

...*but forgot him*. A sermon preached as part of a summer series on the life of Joseph on July 16, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: GENESIS 39:22-40:23
PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13

Last week,
We saw how Joseph was given a free one way ticket to prison
He had been falsely accused and humanly speaking he was in a hopeless situation.
Easy to be bitter.
Easy to have fussed about
Egyptian racial discrimination
Easy to cry out about the injustice of the system
Or even about how unfair was God.

In fact,
Joseph stands out as an Old Testament poster boy of one who was repeatedly mistreated.
By the end of the lesson Lynda read this morning our story teller says, **the chief cupbearer, however did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.**

Can you imagine Joseph's facial expressions and body language when day after day no word comes about Joseph's release?
I wonder, has the cupbearer forgotten.

I wonder did Joseph ask of the jailer “Have you not heard anything about my situation yet.

I wonder how many times he asked that question Before he stopped asking it.

I wonder when Joseph truly realized, ‘the cupbearer has forgotten me.’

We know the rest of the story, so it is always tempting to skip over the difficult portion and get to the ‘good stuff’ isn’t it?

Well, the good stuff is going to come

Yet, linger here with chapter 40 which does not end on an upbeat note – we must.

Why?

There are important reminders, helps, guidelines to help us weather the not so nice times in this life The times we can with legitimacy shout or lament – it’s just not fair

Is anything right or good going to ever happen?

Those times where we often move from high hopes to little if any hope.

Those times when even God seems silent.

Times that come upon us all.

I believe we all struggle with disappointments in our lives.

Perhaps not wrongful imprisonment,

But what about circumstances over which we have little or no control

And from which we are unable to remove ourselves – that result in disappointment.

Or perhaps it is a time when those you have trusted, believed in and provided unique opportunities for advancement tell outright lies and strategize to destroy you
Without regard to your sense of well-being and the feelings of your family.

In such a situation, one does struggle with bouts of anger, depression and bitterness.

Or perhaps still more of you find yourself dealing with things for which you have prayed – it looks like finally God is going to answer
__WHOOSH – it does not happen and your hopes are dashed.

At such times it is hard not to be disappointed with God

It is easy to feel like God is playing some sort of cruel game with you

Why did He make it look like He was going to answer only to dash your hopes?

If that happens more than once, to protect yourself from further hurt you may stop praying and hoping at all!

There is good reason why the prayer book of the Bible – the Psalms – a book with which Jesus himself was familiar – contains over 50 Psalms of lament – 1/3 rd. of the total – that deal with coming to terms with disorientation, Disappointment and life's unfairness.

So what reminders for living today can be drawn from this episode of the Joseph story? Joseph's life had plenty of ups and downs. He experienced shattered dreams and he was about to suffer yet another huge disappointment.

One the day the cupbearer was released, I can imagine a conversation something like this – Cupbearer takes Joseph by the hand, perhaps places his other hand on Joseph's shoulder and says, "Thanks for everything Joe. You've been fantastic. I don't know how I'd have got through this without you

I won't forget you

Yes, of course I will put in a good word for you

It is obvious you should not be here

"Yes, as soon as I have a chance, I'll do that Rest assured my friend..."

Chapter 40 though does not end that way

**Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph,
but forgot him (vs 23)**

Right!

Even the most well intentioned people can disappoint us at times.

Fact: people sometimes let us down

They do not meet up to our hopes and expectations.

This should not surprise us of course because another fact is – we too so easily let others down.

We too sometimes fail and disappoint those we love and care about.

That is a reality in this life

And your point Herb?

Being a believer, a follower of the Lord does not remove you or prevent you from experiencing life's disappointments.

You are not given Teflon and Kevlar body armour when you say 'yes' to Jesus

Life remains difficult

Life will continue to have its ups and downs.

The difference is and it is a big difference-- in saying yes to Jesus means that you do not go through life without the awareness of God's love, mercy, grace and care of you

When certain persuasions of the American southern church folk say "God is good" – and the response is "all the time, all the time" -- THEY MEAN IT

They can point or cite examples of God's goodness even in the most horrific of times and situations.

The scriptures do not tell us specifically 'how' in God's strength Joseph managed to remain hopeful in prison,

Nor how specifically Joseph was able to be continually aware of God's presence with him.

We are only told that Joseph did NOT become bitter or resentful.

Oh, I believe Joseph had his moments of resentment, bitterness and anger.

But he did not allow those moments to become the dominant emotions in his life

Again, we are not told the how he managed this,
Only that he did!

I believe one coping mechanism with anger and disappointment not becoming the default or given is *lament – a crying out, fist shaking, tears, and foot stomping to God.*

Because life is NOT fair

Life is difficult

God does say no to our yes,

Yes, to our no and wait, when we want to get on with it

Not because God is petulant or mimsy

Rather owing to the fact that He is able to see the small screen –our lives and circumstances AND

the bigger picture, the longer view

The Kairos perspective – God’s time

The perspective that affirms that we as his people are in his hands and shall ever remain such as long as WE choose to be so

And that God’s purposes are much bigger than your agenda and my agenda,

Or you to do list or my to-do list

LAMENT, as Biblically understood, does in time remove bitterness that is corrosive,
Anger that will kill the soul if not the body

And unchecked disappointment that only leads to among other things a poor and very warped sense of self-worth and self-loathing.

St. Paul, in his Philippian letter – the New Testament reading this morning had a similar Joseph perspective on life

For Paul was also in prison when he wrote the Philippian letter.

Paul's words do not reflect a resignation or just going through the motions of life.

Rather – a conscious realization that holding onto God is the only way we're going to make it through this life and continue to have a sense of meaning, purpose and hope

Still another reminder from this part of the Joseph story is Joseph's realization that *his disappointments, his down times, the unjust and unfair experiences of his life*

Were moving him to a place of realization that his HOPE WAS IN GOD ALONE.

You will not find this specifically cited in this morning's reading.

There is certainly the reference to the interpretation of dreams belong to God, not Joseph (vs. 8)

That is certainly a significant shift in how Joseph views the world and God and his own place in it

But I contend that while in prison, Joseph learned important lessons about depending upon God alone in the whole of his life.

For example,

If that hope in God had not been there, Joseph would have probably been consumed by self-pity

That is not the case is it

For chapters 39-40 clearly say Joseph became quickly known as one who served others (39:23)

If we found ourselves in a situation akin to Joseph's How many of us would be so consumed with self-pity that we would never even consider the needs of others

But not Joseph – he observed the troubled looks on the faces of the cupbearer and baker

In defending his innocence, Joseph could have run down his brothers and the Potipars

But Joseph tactfully says that he was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and that he had done nothing to deserve being thrown into prison.

He was not having anything to do with a pity party!

If hope in God had not been there, by this point in his life, Joseph could well have devolved into being a complete cynic.

When the two men mentioned their dreams, he could have sneered “Yeah, I used to believe in dreams

Look where it got me.”

Instead there is a very positive attitude

**Do not interpretations belong to God? Please
tell them to me (40:8)**

Having a hope in God that is real and intentional will help you focus on the things you can do, not on the things you cannot do!

Just as Joseph had no control over many of the things that happened to him,
Neither do we
But with God as the focus, we can better control our attitudes in response to the things that DO happen to us

That is not to deny reality or overlook problems.

It is though to have a conviction like St. Paul's
¹²I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.

How?

¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (vs 13)

If our hope is in God – and I contend that for Joseph such is beginning –
Then God will be the first thing we think about in a crisis,

Not the last!

For God is always sovereign,
Even when it seems He has forgotten you or I
God is never unfaithful or cruel,
Even when circumstances seem otherwise
God's promises ARE true in HIS timing, not ours
Certain life lessons we cannot and will not learn
except through waiting on God.

Some of you have experienced some
difficult disappointments
Some of you may well be in the middle of difficult
and hard disappointments – a serious health
problem,
A job loss,
A friend who has turned on you
A situation that has not turned out the way you
hoped or wanted it to do
You had high hopes, but now your hope level
seems to be running close to empty or on residual
fumes!

Hear the scriptures,
As God never gave up on Joseph, he does not give
up on any of us.

Yes, it is true, when life's disappointments
come, they often accompanied by bitterness, anger
despair, despondency, depression, the cry of what's
the use!

The call and the challenge just as it was for
Joseph and for Paul –is in God’s strength and with
his help to rise above the disappointment,
To see beyond the bitterness and despair
And to hold tenaciously, even if sometimes in tears
To the truth of God’s unchanging love, care, mercy,
provision and grace for each and every one of us.
AMEN